



**BILL NUMBER:** Senate Bill 129

**TITLE:** Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

**COMMITTEE:** Judicial Proceedings

**HEARING DATE:** February 3, 2022

**POSITION:** Support

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The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF) and its members respectfully request a favorable report for Senate Bill 129, as it has the possibility to make a significant impact on the ability to combat human trafficking across the state.

Senate Bill 129 establishes the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program to be administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to provide access to legal representation for certain covered individuals. The covered individuals include Maryland residents detained in the United States and not represented by counsel that earn below a set threshold.

There are legal pathways to lawful status for survivors of human trafficking including the U-Visa, T-Visa, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, and VAWA Self-Petitioner. However, the process to obtain these protections are complicated and best navigated with the assistance of counsel. Without counsel victims of human trafficking may be unaware of the protections federal law avails to them and risk deportation. SB 129 takes the critical step of ensuring that those that are in immigration detention pending immigration proceedings that otherwise meet program requirements have access to counsel. This knowledge will hopefully create the necessary trust in immigrant human trafficking survivors to come forward and seek the assistance they need.

MDHTTF thanks the Committee for its consideration of SB 129 and respectfully requests a favorable report.

For more information, please contact Amanda Rodriguez at [arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org](mailto:arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org) or Melanie Shapiro at [mshapiro@mnadv.org](mailto:mshapiro@mnadv.org), co-chairs of the Legislative Committee of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force.

**About MDHTTF:** Formed in 2007 by the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Attorney General of Maryland, and the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, MDHTTF serves as the lead investigative, prosecutorial, and victim services coordinating body for anti-human trafficking activity in the State of Maryland. MDHTTF has grown to include most law enforcement agencies in the State, all child-serving state agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Homeland Security Investigations, most local State's Attorney's Offices, and dozens of victim service agencies. MDHTTF is comprised of five committees – legislative, law enforcement, victim services, public awareness, and training. During this time, MDHTTF has grown a robust understanding of the issue of human trafficking in Maryland.